

Human mobility: Where do we go from here?

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As discussed in the previous post, the “root causes” strategy has been employed by the European Union and United States in an attempt to increase development and slow migration. While results and intentions can and should be debated, this approach starts to move the narrative in a helpful direction by asking: what can be done so that individuals are not forced to leave their homes? However, to really have an impact, past experience tells us that we need at least three inter-related things:

- Decreased shocks (short-term, acute migrant “push factors” such as conflict, coups, extreme weather events)
- Increased rootedness (long-term ability to see a good future in one’s home country)
- Increased individual agency to choose to migrate or stay (increased legal pathways for migration and a respect for individual aspirations)

The “root causes” strategies address the need to decrease shocks (i.e. improved democracy and governance, conflict prevention, etc.), and could continue to do more to focus on the need to reduce the impact of those shocks (i.e. increasing community and individual resilience). The “root causes” strategies also address some of the ways to improve rootedness or seeing a good future in one’s home country, but our forthcoming research suggests that more could be done such as increasing a sense of security (versus reducing crime and violence alone), and community support for youth (i.e. inclusion and leadership). There is undoubtedly a benefit to the wellbeing of individuals whether or not efforts to reduce shocks and increase optimism actually reduce their intention to migrate.

More challenging is increasing individual agency to choose to stay or migrate. Ideally, this pathway would be twofold, combining added legal migration opportunities with individual agency. Evidence suggests that such an approach could lead to [mutually-beneficial temporary or circular migration](#), with potentially large gains for development in the country of origin and fulfilling labor needs in the country of destination. However, without a major shift in narratives, experience suggests that such an approach may not be politically viable in the near future (though efforts should continue to advocate for increased legal pathways).

Meantime, we have seen where the lack of legal pathways is not going to stop or slow migration, rather it will lead to continued irregular migration. Therefore, we must consider how to increase agency and to respect individual aspirations in a world without sufficient legal migration opportunities. The [integral human development](#) (IHD) lens can help us to better understand and then ideally foster the development of the *whole* of *every* would-be migrant. This is no small challenge, but an important objective with which to struggle. When applied to migration and the “root causes” strategies, IHD helps elucidate the difference between dangerous assumptions

about a migrant's needs and priorities (see [McKeon 2018](#) for a primer), versus promoting individual experiences and voices. Yes, economic and other needs addressed by "root cause" strategies will continue to be addressed in an IHD approach to development. So will (potentially) the desire to be reunited with family who have migrated, the wellbeing and safety of children or grandchildren, the ability to practice one's own lifestyle or spirituality freely, or any other myriad needs in the hierarchy that we might not be able to imagine.

The first step in the IHD approach to migration will therefore require a shift in objectives away from limiting or decreasing migration to a better understanding of *how* the decision to migrate and migration itself occurs (as [Clemens](#) challenges us). This requires a better understanding of the migration decision-making process (a gap in our knowledge base made clear in a recent [migration "root causes" evidence map](#)), and just how economic and social development or decline impact migration decisions.

Meantime, nothing short of a new narrative of "human mobility" as a normal process that has been -and will continue- happening for centuries will also be necessary. Any approach that sees human mobility as something that we must reduce or stop will inevitably fail (as [de Haas](#) notes). Informed by IHD, this narrative must explicitly recognize the agency, dignity and rights of individuals to determine their own future as a starting point. Only then will we be on a path toward the freedom to stay or the right not to be forced to go.